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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by Liberation, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 February 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Human rights abuses against the minorities Mauritania

Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the 10th of December 1948 states "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms". It has been over sixty years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and affirmed by the Member States of the United Nations.The realisation that slavery is still alive and well in any part of the world is a tragedy. It is almost inconceivable that after many decades since the wave of abolitions in the late 19th and early 20th century, chattel slavery is still practiced openly in Mauritania.

Mauritania consists of three main ethnic groups; the Haratins (Black Moors), Afro-Mauritanians and the White Moors. It is estimated that up to 20 percent of the population of Mauritania is enslaved.

The group which is enslaved is the Haratins who are subjected to further human rights abuses such as; sexual exploitation, child abuse, curtailed movement and forced marriage. The Haratins are considered to be the "property" of the White Moors and their status as slaves is passed on through inheritance. This shows that there is an element of racial discrimination against the black population of Mauritania. Furthermore, children often find themselves victims and this further impinges on their right to education as they are forced to work while they should be in school.

Despite many efforts to put an end to slavery in Mauritania, the practice persists. In 1981, Mauritania abolished slavery even though the ownership of slaves was not prohibited. In 2007, the ownership of slaves became illegal and punishable by law but according to SOS Esclaves, the new law has not improved the situation much. Mauritania has not done much to enforce the laws passed and it appears the government is not eager to do so.

As we observe the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the 21st of March, we urge the Council to reflect and address this persistent problem. As we also remember the Victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade on the 25th of March, it is imperative that we remember that victims of a similar fate are being born daily in Mauritania.

The Mauritanian government should be more accountable for the human rights abuse suffered by this group of people in the country and we urge the Council to ensure this is being done. As we continue to fight the war for greater freedoms, we must not forget to fight the war to end slavery.